At home with history during epidemic

S

Stay indoors doesn’t mean canceling all leisure activities. In China, museums are setting their sights on the Internet to keep their ardent history lovers entertained during the novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) epidemic.

For some years now, visiting museums has been a favored way to celebrate the Spring Festival among Chinese people, thanks to the popularity of variety shows featuring cultural relics as well as exhibitions and souvenirs that have become trending topics of discussion on social media.

During last year’s weeklong Spring Festival holiday, about 40 percent of tourists went to museums, according to a data analysis by an affiliate of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. The figure is not surprising considering other statistics. For example, the National Cultural Heritage Administration suggests museums in China drew more than 1.1 billion visits last year.

However, the museum frenzy is on pause for this year’s prolonged Spring Festival holiday due to the 2019-nCoV outbreak. Since Jan. 22, when efforts to fight the epidemic increased, museums nationwide started to announce temporary closures to control the spread of the virus.

The Hubei Provincial Museum in Wuhan, the capital city of Hubei Province at the epicenter of the outbreak, will remain closed at least through Saturday, according to an official announcement. The prestigious museum is known for its collection of cultural treasures.

In China, museums are setting their sights on the Internet to keep their ardent history lovers entertained during the novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) epidemic.

However, this does not mean people are staying indoors due to the epidemic, museums during the vacation, but are having digital exhibitions. As in the past, QR codes are provided on social media by the museums for people to easily access their collections online.

The National Administration of Cultural Heritage has so far recommended taking measures such as setting daily caps on visitor numbers and cutting educational and celebratory events, but it has also announced it intends to remain closed for now. “We had already prepared many activities for your Spring Festival. However, in our point of view, it is vital to control the virus and ensure your safety,” says a notice from the museum.

According to National Cultural Heritage Administration requirements, museums nationwide must remain vigilant in upholding hygiene, public security and fire safety during closures, and their social media accounts should remain active and respond to any questions from visitors.

However, this does not mean people are now thoroughly isolated from cultural treasures.

On Jan. 27, the cultural administration held a special meeting to encourage museums to launch online exhibitions of their collections, making full use of the digitization projects undertaken in recent years. “Online exhibits” will promote the combination of new technology and our inheritance of our country’s cultural heritage and gather resources of the museums through “cloud” displays,” a statement from the administration says.

And museums have been seen responding eagerly as people continue their “visits” to these venues via virtual means.

The Palace Museum, for example, has adopted virtual reality technology to offer online tours. The project, named “The Panoramic Palace Museum,” covers all major places of interest within the 720,000-square-meter compound. The Capital Museum, Suzhou Museum in Jiangsu Province, Hunan Museum in Changsha, and many other such institutions have also “opened” their galleries digitally.

In recent years, many museums have had digital exhibitions. As in the past, QR codes are provided on social media by the museums for people to easily access their collections online.

The National Administration of Cultural Heritage has so far recommended around 50 such exhibitions through its WeChat account.

Chinese culture enthusiasts who had earlier planned to physically visit museums during the vacation, but are staying indoors due to the epidemic, have welcomed the digital shows.

The cultural administration further announced Saturday the opening of national databases of the country’s cultural institutions, including even more information on registered cultural relics, “unmovable” cultural heritage sites (referring mainly to ancient architecture and historical monuments), digitized images of statues and frescoes, and more content for public-viewing.

In Guangdong, a WeChat mini-program developed by the Guangdong culture and tourism authority and China Internet giant Tencent provides online access to 57 State-owned museums and 45 private museums and includes videos of cultural activities such as the light shows at the Shenzhen Civic Center.

In a letter to Guan Qiang, deputy director of the National Administration of Cultural Heritage, Suay Aksoy, president of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), writes: “We have learned that following the closure of museums … your organizations have been campaigning for and promoting the maximum use of the museums’ online exhibitions and other projects to minimize the effects of the closures.

“We applaud the actions taken by China during these extraordinary days of the coronavirus emergency. “It goes without saying that ICOM is always ready to help in any way that is possible within our mandate.

Museums are also joining hands to fight the virus head on. The National Museum of China has donated 5,000 medical masks to the Hubei Provincial Museum to support its preventive efforts. In a letter of thanks to the National Museum of China, Fang Qin, director of the Hubei museum, writes: “This gives us impetus to perform well during this campaign.”

A screen shot of the online tour project of the Palace Museum “The Panoramic Palace Museum.” The project covers all major places of interest within the 720,000-square-meter compound.

Photos by SD-Agencies

CULTURE

Wednesday February 5, 2020

CONTACT US AT: 8351-9409, YUENPONG@HOTMAIL.COM

People visit a calligraphy exhibition at the National Museum of China in Beijing on Jan. 16.

Xinhua

A screen shot of the WeChat mini program developed by the Guangdong culture and tourism authority and Tencent.

A screen shot of the online tour project of the Palace Museum “The Panoramic Palace Museum.” The project covers all major places of interest within the 720,000-square-meter compound.

Photos by SD-Agencies

Scan the QR code to access the Guangdong/Tencent museum-viewing WeChat mini program.